

PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Based on Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines, Department of the Army (DA) defines sexual harassment as:

- (a) Influencing, offering to influence, or threatening the career, pay, or job of another person (woman or man) in exchange for sexual favors; or
- (b) Deliberate or repeated offensive comments, gestures, or physical contact of a sexual nature in a work or duty-related environment.

Sexual harassment violates acceptable standards of integrity and conduct required of all Army personnel and interferes with mission accomplishment.

Everyone has a responsibility to prevent this behavior, but you must be able to recognize it. Incidents of sexual harassment can be grouped into the following categories:

- ❖ **Verbal (most common);** can take the form of sexual comments or may involve blatant demands for sexual favors, such as a proposition. Verbal also includes profanity and telling obscene jokes.
- ❖ **Physical;** includes pinching, bumping, grabbing, touching, etc.
- ❖ **Senior/Subordinate Abuse;** includes direct propositions, threats to a person's career, pay, or job in exchange for sexual favors.
- ❖ **Indecent Actions and Gestures;** includes leaving sexually suggestive notes, displaying sexist cartoons and pictures, using obscene gestures.
- ❖ **Sexually harassing behavior;** can range from subtle to blatant behavior.

There are several critical elements in the definition of sexual harassment:

- ❖ Observable
- ❖ Explicitly/implicitly sexual or containing sexual overtures
- ❖ Deliberate (or repeated)
- ❖ Creating a hostile or offensive work environment
- ❖ Occurring in a work-related environment

Some steps that you as an employee, can take to prevent sexual harassment follow:

(a) Mandatory training. It is a DA requirement that all civilian supervisors take the basic 4-hour Prevention of Sexual Harassment course. This applies to all newly appointed or existing supervisors who have never had the basic 4-hour Army course—this requires a classroom setting and is a one-time requirement. New employees are also required to attend basic POSH. Army further requires that all supervisors and employees attend refresher POSH training biennially. This may be presented in a classroom setting or as an on-line course.

(b) Review your behavior and personal workspace from the perspective of how it may be *perceived*, as opposed to your *intent*.

- ❖ Does your behavior contribute to work output and/or mission accomplishment? Examples: Discussion of personal life or problems; emphasis on developing social life instead of work.
- ❖ Does your behavior offend or hurt other members of the work force? Examples: Gender-related jokes, posters, cartoons, etc.; language that targets or puts down any group, including women.
- ❖ Could your behavior be misinterpreted as intentionally harmful or harassing? Example: Constant sexually suggestive comments; deliberate or repeated physical contact.
- ❖ Could your behavior be sending signals that invite harassing behavior? Example: Clothing that is too tight, revealing, or too informal for work; expecting or giving personal favors based on gender related issues.

(c) Monitor environmental warning signals and take immediate action before any situation becomes serious.

(d) Identify behaviors that require preventive action. This involves recognizing that certain behavior accepted by some people as customary is no longer acceptable; e.g., watch the "hugging" or terms of endearment. The difficulty is to determine when, in a day-to-day situation, you, as the employee may want to indicate this behavior is offensive. **THERE IS NO BLANKET RULE TO FIT EVERY SITUATION.**

(e) Give feedback to employees on their behavior. For example, while there is no formal dress code, an employee can be requested to "dress appropriately" for the type of work s/he does.

(g) Recognize and actively support employees' rights, including the right to have their feelings taken seriously by peers, co-workers, and by supervisors and managers.

PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW IF YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE A VICTIM OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment means different things to different people. Everyone is guilty of doing things without really considering the impact the actions may have on others. However, if you believe you are a victim of sexual harassment, you should take the following actions:

(a) The first step you should take is to put the harasser on notice (with witnesses, if possible). Tell the harasser the behavior is not acceptable (an emphatic “NO,”) and that you will report the matter to the chain of command if the behavior continues.

(b) Document every incident. Write down what was done or said and include the date, time, and witnesses' responses.

(c) If the harassment continues, contact your supervisor. If your supervisor is the harasser, contact their supervisor and request a meeting. At the meeting present a written letter, signed and dated. Describe what actions you have taken and ask for additional help. Ask them what they are going to do about the situation.

(d) If the supervisor/chain of command fails to act, contact an EEO Officer and file a complaint.

2. As a victim, if you do nothing, the chances are good that the behavior will not stop. Use the redress system that is designed to listen and investigate your allegation.